

International Journal of Advanced Scientific Research & Development

Vol. 05, Iss. 05, Ver. I, May' 2018, pp. 13 – 25

e-ISSN: 2395-6089 p-ISSN: 2394-8906

AXIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: 08 May 2018; Received in revised form:

21 May 2018;

Accepted: 22 May 2018; Published online: 10 Jun 2018.

Key words:

Axiological Aspects, Foreign Language Teaching, Intercultural Activities.

ABSTRACT

Foreign languages (FL) have been taught for various reasons and it has been done in different ways. Thanks to multimedia contents and the development of didactics of FL teaching, the process of FL learning has recently been turning into an encounter with a different culture and a different value system. According to the dominant, current trends, the prevailing opinion is that the inclusion of value systems into FL classes can have positive effects. Students should be helped to understand the deep and serious implications for the functioning of the system of values, as well as to be encouraged to be open and critical towards them. Due to the immense importance of the acquisition of values during primary school education and because of the fact that the teaching of FLs, especially intercultural activities are very suitable for the adoption of the same, the authors of this paper conducted a survey among Croatian primary school FL teachers with the aim of finding out the extent to which teachers themselves are aware of the importance of certain values and the potential that they could be passed on through FL teaching and intercultural contents. A selfstructured online questionnaire was used. For each item of the questionnaire, the mean values were analysed. According to the results, FL teachers in our sample believe that through FL teaching intercultural contents can be passed on to students. Knowledge came first, followed by openness and critical thinking. According to FL teachers prejudices and stereotypes can be suppressed most easily.

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Cite this article as: Tomić, Draženko., Legac, Vladimir., & Filipan-Žignić, Blaženka., "Axiological Aspects of Foreign Language Teaching". International Journal of Advanced Scientific Research & Development (IJASRD), 05 (05/I), 2018, pp. 13 – 25. https://doi.org/10.26836/jjasrd/2018/v5/i5/50502.

INTRODUCTION

Every action in nature is necessarily mutual. Reciprocity implies exchange. In addition to the basic (animal) segment that includes mere exchange of substances, the interaction of a human being is increasingly intensified by a segment belonging to the rational nature, and as such it is generally taken as an aspect of the intangible interaction (communication), where, it is our opinion, the interaction of value systems really belong. If the latter is true, the subject of this discussion may be limited to two: the method and content of value interactions between human individuals.

Here the authors examine the question of how FL learning encourages interaction of value systems with particular implications for those who learn a FL. The authors are trying to show that the accompanying elements (illustrations, short stories, interpretation of various facts, self-esteem and similar) affect the interaction of value systems. Furthermore, what is the relationship between language and values? At the primary level it does not mean that the relationship between them is proportional: A more sophisticated language and higher values, nor the other way round: Primitive language and lower values. Some uneducated man can be just as noble, if not more, than someone who is very eloquent. However, at the secondary level, in communication, things are somewhat different: A more precise and richer language can more easily provide a value. For such a person there is a possibility to describe something more precisely and to convey their own or other people's condition, which, in the absence of words or by means of awkward constructions is not possible, and it becomes necessary to resort to non-verbal speech (facial or body gestures). What Pasini mentions when talking about learning Croatian as a FL, can also be said about learning any other FL: Teaching a FL is a complex process in which the static language structures alternate with dynamic value (cultural) units, thus making the whole sociocultural FL and its cultural identity. (Pasini, 2010)

The objective of this study was the investigation of the attitudes of the Croatian primary school FL teachers towards the importance of certain values and whether or not they are suitable to be passed on to students through FL teaching and intercultural contents.

1.1 Values, Society, Process of FL Learning and Teaching and their Mutual Interrelationship

1.1.1 Values and Value Systems

The values in this context are understood as powerful ideas that attract and motivate to action, that humanize when they are exercised (Hoblaj, 2006), a goal to be achieved and adopted, meaning that man wants to give to his activities, glasses through which we value the world. Values provide a framework of thought and emotional behaviour, plan of personal and social action; they meet certain psychological and sociological, or possibly some biological needs; they connect and homogenize people, but they also separate them; they reveal what is socially permissible or not, and therefore they shape the behaviour of growing up, education, training and professional development. (Bajzek, 1985; Baričević, 1987) Values are a kind of a "code" that controls human behavior: By knowing the values, expectations and reactions can be predicted, they make it possible for a person to determine the level of tolerance of an individual or a community. The problem with values is that they are not a visible part of the spectrum of the elements of a culture. Everything

stems out of them, but they are not visible at first sight. Katunarić's appropriate thought may seem odd: A culture is an order of realized values. (Katunarić, 1996) Axiology is a philosophical discipline which examines the values. (Kutleša, 2012)

Although the values make "petrified reality", especially when seen on an abstract level, they are a plural and dynamic reality that does not exist by itself. Communication is the key essential feature of the value, manifestation of values, and the process that creates, forms and decomposes them. Thus values are changeable dependent variables that depend on the time and circumstances, as it is emphasized by Bajzek and other authors. (Bajzek, 1985; Baloban, 2014) However, the values also contain a dose of stability. Baričević and Čorić warn us to exercise caution by pointing to the results published in the The European Values Study in 1981 according to which in many areas of values (family, individual and social morality) there is a pronounced generational continuity. (Baričević, 1987; Čorić, 2002, Šunjić, 2012) The discontinuity is noticeable in the areas of sexuality, marriage and religion. (Baloban, 1999; Baloban, 2014) Values are exclusive - we can never achieve all the values at the same time – by opting for one value one leaves aside the others. Exclusivity and differences are even more pronounced in the bounded sets that are here called value systems.

The value system is inherent in every community. Size of a community affects the flexibility of the system of values. An individual who in a certain milieu behaves by a different pattern of values is regarded as a stranger, a sick person or perhaps as an eccentric. So by practicing behaviour according to different value patterns a person can be extracted from their milieu or environment. The understanding and effective communication between people often depends on understanding value systems. Katunarić (somewhat pessimistic) claims that to achieve understanding between different values is not possible in the end, and neither is, therefore, the coexistence. He argues that Western universalism is not a result of the harmonization of different values, but the instrumental performance of one value at the expense of others by means of world market and military forces. (Katunarić, 1996)

We have mentioned communication as an essential component of a value. Communication is one of the forms of reciprocity (interaction). Communication between value systems is manifested as rejection, indifference and / or acceptance. If a human (rational) communication is a (more or less present) communication of different value systems and if each of us belongs to different value (sub)systems, then the culture of communication among value entities is crucial for avoiding conflicts and even the survival of these entities. Unlike the non-verbal communication (laughing, crying, angry gestures...) and signs, which are largely understandable to everyone but at the same time narrowed by their possibilities and their general content, verbal communication is by their ability wider and more precise. However, it is more challenging in that it implies the knowledge of a specific voice system (the language).

Value system is present in all dimensions of human life and in language as well. Thus, values determine what is appropriate to talk or write about. On one hand they bring some order into everyday language practice. But on the other, language is a symbol of social value and identity. Language expresses the value reality through its verbal and non-verbal aspects. The acquisition of a FL can contribute to changes in the scale of values. It contributes to better understanding and even the formation of a different value system.

Pasini says that through language non-native speakers, just as they learn the language, they learn and spontaneously adopt different values of the other and different cultural environment. It starts from the earliest age and continues during the whole process of FL learning. (Pasini, 2010) Language without culture, it is added by Legac, is impersonal, lifeless and static, and the culture is in fact, metaphorically speaking, the language of the human form. (Legac, 2005)

1.1.2 Society, Value Systems and Language Learning

It seems as a kind of a social law that larger communities (and nations) are trying as much as possible to expand their areas of dominance, including through language, value systems and general cultural contents. On the other hand, smaller communities (and nations) are trying to protect their language, culture and value system. By doing so they are less aware of the fact that they depend on larger communities and nations and are constantly undergoing transition processes and give their contribution to the globalization imposed by larger ones. By referring to sources in literature, Katunarić claims that the great nations are always prone to provincialism and harshness, while in small multilingual countries more spontaneous cosmopolitanism is present. (Katunarić, 1996) It is much easier to find much more relevant literature about cultural elements associated with FL learning than about the value dimension. Such discourse should not be dismissed due to the fact that the value aspect of today is seen as an integral part of a wider concept – the culture. In addition, the often mentioned crisis of values, is exactly associated with the changing of culture. (Supčić, 2002)

A society that is doing its best to intensify around the compactness of its own value system carefully watches over all value contents including those that are used as supporting materials in FL teaching. Different value contents are avoided or even perceived as a threat of their own entities. (Tomić, 2014) FL learning then generally takes place within the limits of its own value system and in those situations or historical events that reinforce the thesis of the dominant value system. Learning a language can thus be tantamount to learning grammar and giving terms or names by means of other sound systems, factual information about a foreign country and its people, that is to a limited amount of contents with a cultural focus used in a particular textbook. FL teaching can thus be mainly tantamount to the facts about the culture and civilization of the target language and the way of life (traditions associated with national holidays and similar contents.) - and to occasional listening to original national songs. (Bilić Štefan, 2006) This approach to FL learning is close to what is by many contemporary authors referred to as a structuralist approach (language as structurally related units which are given encoded meaning) and a functional approach (language as a means of expression of communicative functions. (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2009)

Societies whose value systems are less compact, (we would say open), provide less resistance to value systems and other contents including those that are constituent elements of supporting additional materials in FL teaching. Such societies and individuals are open to different value entities. If this openness is not an implicit expression of the value crisis but an expression of the maturity of the society, then the value differences do not diminish but are an attempt to consciously take the perspective of a different value entity which facilitates integration and competence in a variety of value entities. For

example, in the process of FL learning students learn about the contents like those about social order and relationship of people in new countries towards their government, labour and authority, historical facts, family relationships, respect of minorities, disadvantaged and marginal groups of society, religion, etc. This corresponds to the so-called interactive approach to language (language as a means to achieve interpersonal relationships and to perform social transactions between individuals). (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2009)

We are aware of the fact that each language comes out of some value base. The introduction of this value base to FL teaching increases the awareness of the need for tolerance, questioning and respect of the values of the other and different, which is one of eight factors that make full communicative competence. (Mader & Camerer, 2010) Of course, it should not be forgotten that one's own values are a prerequisite for understanding and acceptance of other people's values. With the development of modern means of communication, the use of interactive computer systems, image and sound recordings, information about homes of native speakers (kitchen, ways of living, work, leisure activities and social system) are becoming easier available, and thus FL learning is also increasingly becoming the learning of other and different value systems, culture and customs. Bilić Stefan outlines that primary school students in grades 5-8 should be prepared to move away from ethnocentrism, relativization as well as for confirmation of their own linguistic, cultural and identity values. (Bilić Štefan, 2008) We agree with Ćavar and Pasini and thus emphasize that relativization of our own value judgments and forms is a prerequisite for the acceptance of diversity. (Cavar & Pasini, 2015) This means that such an effect is trying to be achieved in the young and mostly intellectually very gifted population whose value system has not yet been formed. It is the population that will to a greater deal occupy positions in the humanities and social areas from which the majority of educational and administrative personnel are recruited. We must, however, warn that the relativization of values can ultimately bring about the disintegration of society.

1.1.3 Student, Teacher and Value System in the Process of FL Learning

In this text it has so far been pointed out that modern FL teaching aims for students to realize the value and cultural context of the nation from which the language that students are learning has originated and it is commonly referred to as the concept of intercultural communication competence. (Filipan-Žignić, 2005) This aim is also suggested by the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL, CEF, 2005, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)). It is seen as the ability to establish a successful relationship between one's own and a foreign culture, a kind of sensitivity, and the ability to identify and use different strategies for making contact with people from other cultures. This would first of all mean the contents that the student learns, and then the way in which the contents are displayed, as well as the knowledge of social communities and interactions both in their own and in the interlocutor's environment, interpretation of skills and critical awareness of cultural differences. The intercultural communicative competence is influenced by personal factors like interest and openness, the ability to distance oneself from one's own value pattern, cognitive performance, acceptance of other cultures and of one's own without prejudice, rejection of stereotypes and similar things. (Bilić Štefan, 2008). So today only language competence (i.e., only the transmission of information) is not sufficient for students to be regarded as competent speakers of a language. Hence it is recommended, that one should at least master the cultural form of the interlocutor in terms of the usual polite behaviour of the respective nations. This process is further fuelled by the omnipresent multiculturalism, although, according to Okoniewski, it has to be borne in mind, that students have usually been motived to FL learning by some purely practical reasons related to communicative, family, economic and other reasons. (Okuniewski, 2012)

The teacher is no longer only a person teaching the language but is also the one who talks about other people's values and culture. These challenges are as big as the diversity of values. Most commonly they are related to what is suggested by the textbook and the teacher's own experience. According to several research studies (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2007) primary and secondary school students have shown great satisfaction with textbooks, but it must not be forgotten that by the same studies the FL teacher is cited as the cause of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the tuition. In younger students the main cause of satisfaction are teacher's human qualities and methodological expertise, while in secondary school students the importance of teacher's linguistic and methodological competences are more important. Therefore, it would be good if a FL teacher has had some experience of staying in the country as well as the experience of its value system and its cultural milieu. This would also imply that education authorities should provide teachers with opportunities for lifelong learning that would enable and ensure continuous new knowledge.

The task of the teacher is to point out the differences in values that exist in their and in foreign cultures as well as to make it easier for the student to deal with different values. The use of beautifully coloured, original materials from foreign countries in a FL textbook will certainly contribute to a clearer understanding of their value scale. However, teachers should be aware of the fact that such materials tend to set aside political and economic problems. Teachers should do their best to compare two different value scales and insist on recognizing differences as similarities are not the subject of controversy. In this way, the student's own value system can be more easily better evaluated. In each and every comparison the teacher should insist on real-life situations (rights, status of marginal groups, etc.).

The importance of the role of teachers in the process of transferring values is the main reason why the authors of this paper have decided to investigate their views on their role in passing on values. It is crystal clear that only when FL teachers themselves are aware of the importance of passing on values in FL teaching (especially in passing on intercultural contents) will they be able to achieve the optimum performance of the students.

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aim of Study

The aim of this study was to find out the extent to which teachers themselves are aware of the importance of certain values and to what extent they are aware of the values that can be passed on through FL teaching and intercultural contents.

2.2 Instrument

Only one instrument was used in the study. It was a self-constructed, anonymous, online questionnaire in Croatian consisting of five questions and a general teacher profile

form containing three items, of which two were obligatory and one was optional. The optional item asked the participants to mark their gender. The obligatory items asked the participants to specify the type of school and which FL or languages they teach.

Teachers had to answer the following questions:

- 1. Do you think that through FL teaching values can be passed on to students? Two alternatives were offered: yes and no.
- 2. Mark which of the following five values can be passed on: educational, ethical, personal values and friendship, aesthetic and national.
- 3. Specify which of the following 20 values you personally pass on during your FL tuition: diligence, obedience, honesty, responsibility, solidarity, knowledge, religion, identity, tolerance, critical thinking, openness, respect for the environment, righteousness, conscientiousness, freedom, responsibility, patriotism, friendship, honesty, integrity.
- 4. Do you think that through teaching intercultural contents in FL tuition special values can be passed on? Two alternatives were offered: yes and no.
- 5. Mark which of the following values you personally pass on through intercultural contents: avoidance of ethnocentrism, discrimination, racism and xenophobia, suppression of prejudices and stereotypes, acceptance of diversity, openness and criticism.

The items 2, 3 and 5 were all 5-point Likert scale type questions.

2.3 Participants

Research was carried out among 64 teachers of FLs. Six of them (9.4%) were men and 58 (90.6%) were women. This is not unusual. On the contrary, it reflects the reality, as for well over half of the century over 90% of the university students studying to become FL teachers have been women.

The breakdown of the teachers in our sample with reference to FL(s) they were teaching at the time of data collection is shown in Table 1 below. At the time of data collection some of the respondents were teaching two different FLs. Therefore, neither does the sum of individual components of the distribution of teachers in percentages equal 100, (it is more than that), nor does the sum of the individual numbers of teachers equal 64 (for the same reason the figure is naturally higher). English is the language that is mostly taught as a foreign language in Croatian schools and the number of teachers teaching it is probably higher than of those teaching other foreign languages. However, the greatest response to the survey was among German language teachers.

Table - 1: Characteristics of Teachers According to Foreign Languages

Foreign Language	Number of Teachers	Percentage of Teachers
English	25	39.1
German	39	60.9
French	6	9.4
Spanish	1	1.6

2.4 Procedure

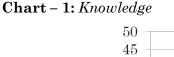
In mid-February 2016 the online questionnaire was uploaded. Data collection was then organised in the second half of the same month and the beginning of March. The authors of the paper sent an invitation e-mail to FL teacher representatives in all the 20 Croatian counties asking them to forward it to as many FL teachers in primary schools as possible. The invitation e-mail acquainted the teachers with the purpose of the study, gave them an Internet link to the online questionnaire (http://goo.gl/forms/4uxpJSXWkJ), informed them that their participation was voluntary and asked them kindly to fill it in. Knowing that nowadays teachers can be piled with many similar invitations, they hoped to get a three-digit figure of teacher response.

RESULTS

In this paper the authors would like to offer graphical presentations that will be easy to follow for the readers and they therefore focus on the most important points of the questionnaire. They presentation of the results is divided in two sections: 3.1 – General opinion of Croatian foreign language teachers about the possibility of passing on values to students through teaching in foreign language classes and 3.2 – Opinion of Croatian foreign language teachers about the possibility of passing on values to students through teaching specific intercultural contents in foreign language classes

3.1 General Opinion of Croatian Foreign Language Teachers about the Possibility of Passing on Values to Students Through Teaching in Foreign Language Classes

In the first place the authors would like to point out that the results of the research have shown that all teachers in the sample truly believe that through FL teaching all five values mentioned in the second question of the questionnaire can be passed on to students. The agreement percentages were the following: educational (100%), ethical (100%), personal and friendly (100%), aesthetic (92.2%) and national (92.2). The means were calculated for all the values and the order from the highest to the lowest average was the following: 1. knowledge (M=4.67), 2. openness (M=4.38), 3. critical thinking (M=4.08), 4. obedience (4.02), 5. identity (M=3,96), 6. patriotism (3.58) and 7. religion (M=2.69) (See charts 1-7).



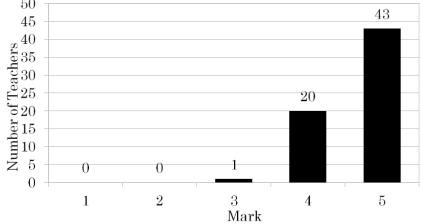


Chart - 2: Openness

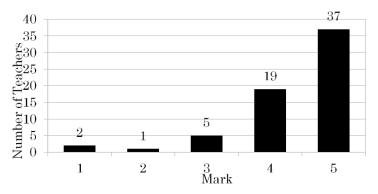


Chart - 3: Critical thinking

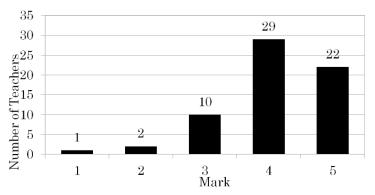


Chart - 4: Obedience

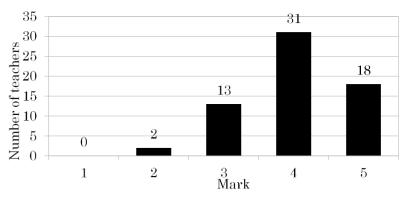


Chart - 5: Identity

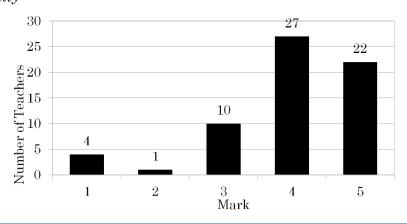


Chart - 6: Patriotism

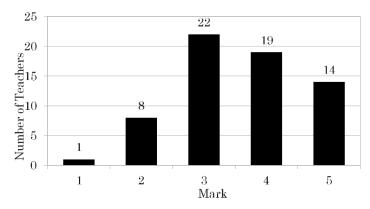
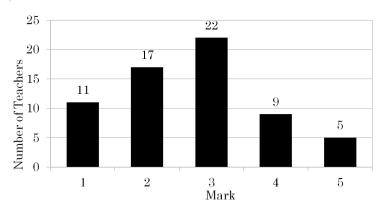


Chart - 7: Religion



3.2 Opinion of Croatian foreign language teachers about the possibility of passing on values to students through teaching specific intercultural contents in foreign language classes

Extremely praised should be the fact that research results have shown that all teachers (100%) believe that through intercultural contents in FL teaching values can be passed on to students. Thus FL teachers in our sample believe that to a large extent values such as avoidance of ethnocentrism, discrimination, racism and xenophobia, suppression of prejudice and stereotypes, acceptance of diversity, openness and criticism can be passed on. According to FL teachers in our sample the biggest influence can be achieved in the suppression of prejudices and stereotypes (M=4.59). Less influence can be made by teachers to make students more open (M=4.52) and to avoid ethnocentric (M=4.25). They think that their influence is lowest in making students more critical (M = 4.23) (See charts 8-11).

Chart - 8: Suppression of Prejudices and Stereotypes

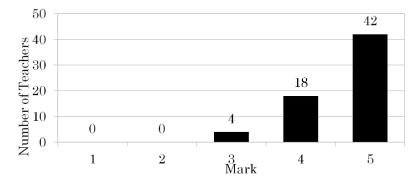


Chart - 9: Openness

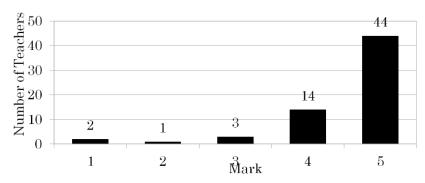


Chart – **10:** Avoidance of Ethnocentrism

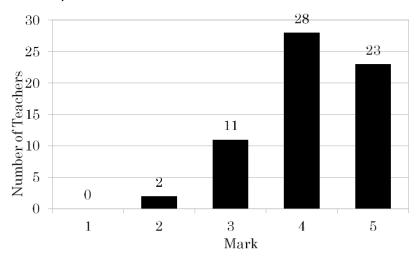
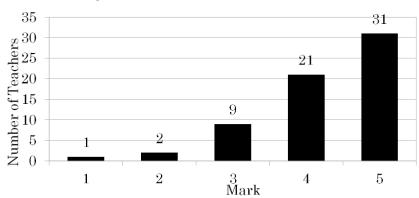


Chart - 11: Critical Thinking



LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although the authors of the paper had sent an invitation e-mail to FL teacher representatives in all the 20 Croatian counties asking them to forward it to as many FL teachers in primary schools as possible, the participation of FL teachers was not as high as it had been expected and the greatest response to the survey was among German language teachers. Therefore, the authors of this paper intend to do a follow-up study with a different preparation. In order to motivate more English language teachers in primary schools, they will make earlier announcements for the survey at regular meetings, workshops, seminars

and conferences organised by the Croatian Association of Teachers of English in all the major regions of the country.

Furthermore, the authors have also started their preparations for similar research studies abroad so that the obtained results from this and the subsequent studies in Croatia could be compared with those obtained in different cultural backgrounds. They consider it to be important with regard to different attitudes towards the same values in different cultures.

CONCLUSION

Value system is present in all dimensions of human life and in language as well. Thus values determine what is appropriate for a person to talk or write about, they bring order in everyday language practice. This paper dealt with the question of how FL learning encourages interaction of value systems and with their implications for FL students. We have found that FL acquisition can contribute to changes in students' value scales. Therefore, it is often spoken about cultural (value) components related to FL learning. The introduction of the value system in FL teaching increases the awareness of the need for tolerance, questioning and respect of the value system of other and different as one of the pillars of full communicative competence. The very first prerequisite for all this is the relativization of our one's own value judgments and forms. The second prerequisite for this is the adaptation of the contents which the student learns, and then the ways in which they are conveyed, as well as the knowledge of social communities and interactions both in the students' own and their interlocutor's milieu, the interpretation skills and critical awareness of cultural differences.

It is clear that teachers have a big role in all this. Therefore, it is very encouraging that the results of our study have shown that all FL teachers in our sample believe that through FL teaching intercultural contents can be passed on to students. Of all the values knowledge came first, followed by openness and critical thinking. Through intercultural contents, according to FL teachers in the sample, prejudices and stereotypes can be suppressed most easily. This is followed by raising students' openness, avoidance of ethnocentrism and raising students' criticism. All this speaks in favour of the fact that teachers who are themselves aware of the importance of transferring values through FL tuition will insist on it in their teaching, particularly in the transfer of intercultural contents that are highly suitable for passing on values.

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